

Book Review

Hurlburt, Sarah. 1977. *The Mussel Cookbook*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 169 pp., text illustrations. 8 vo. \$8.95.

Years ago, after our first feast of steamed mussels, with white wine and butter, my family swore an oath to dine forevermore on *Mytilus edulis* in lieu of our old favorite, the Cape Cod steamer, *Mya arenaria*. Some of the family may have made this choice because of Yankee frugality. Blue mussels were, and still are, abundant, accessible, and only costly in the labor of harvesting.

Now, Sarah Hurlburt gives the blue mussel its culinary due. Whether it be a traditional *Éclade* from Provence or a novel variation on the Hawaiian *Pupus*, she runs the gamut of international mussel cuisine. *Mytilus* readily adapts to soy sauce, wine, beer, or cream bases; to cloves, capers, basil, horseradish, saffron, or dijon spices; to potato, eggplant, tomato, or even to the piquant cranberry complements.

The author offers more than a mere cookbook. She provides a reasoned argument for our cultivation of mussels. This shellfish grows plump on phytoplankton; cattle grow fat on grain. Beef cattle consume 21 pounds of protein to produce one pound of meat protein. Granted our Western palate can afford steak, but as prices rise, Hurlburt suggests that we acquire a preference for this protein of the sea.

She suggests we seriously consider the mariculture of *Mytilus*. This has been successful in Europe, where yields are impressive. Spain, the world's largest producer, cultivates mussels on rafts and produces upwards of 220,000 tons a year. France's pole culture and Holland's bottom culture also have high yields. Hurlburt proposes that a site such as Cape Cod Bay, an area of less than 300 square miles, could be a blue mussel fishery. Ideally, she envisions the Bay as yielding 43 billion pounds of meat a year!

The mussel is a filter feeder, reaping a mixed harvest of nutrients and whatever contaminants, natural or otherwise, flow with the tide. The problem is to keep the mariculture free from pollution and invasions of such dinoflagellates as *Gonyaulax*, which cause paralysis.

Purchase this succulent shellfish in the market, or have fun and gather *Mytilus* from our rocky shores. Then prepare this delicacy, following one of the author's recipes that accords with your mood.

—HARRIET HORNBLOWER